

Hello:

My name is Ronald Gross, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to address the funding recommendations in HB-6659 that comes from the American Rescue Plan Act and the General Fund to address gun violence intervention programs.

This American Rescue Plan Act is so appropriately named because I believe that we, as a society, need to be rescued from the epidemic of gun violence that is today a true public health crisis. I am a trauma surgeon, and I have spent the last 47 years caring for the victims and the families of victims of gun violence. Gun violence and its repercussions – medical, psychological, and yes, financial - are worse today than at any time in our nation's history, on the victims, on their families, and yes, on the caregivers who deal with this epidemic every single day. I am tired of looking into the eyes of parents when I have to tell them that their child just died from his or her gunshot wounds.

In an average year in America, gun violence kills over 40,000 people, it wounds twice as many, and has an economic consequence to our nation of \$557 billion dollars – that's billion with a b – every year. In an average year in Connecticut, someone is killed with a gun every three days. In an average year in Connecticut, 191 people die and 576 are wounded by guns. In an average year in Connecticut, the societal cost of gun violence is estimated to be \$1.2 billion dollars, and \$60 to \$90 million of that cost is paid by us, the taxpayers.

Connecticut has some of the toughest gun laws in the nation, but we must do better. We must invest in a public health approach to this gun violence pandemic that de-escalates conflict and breaks the cycles of violence that all too often involve the use of a firearm. We can do this by funding locally based programs where gun violence is most prevalent, programs that focus on prevention and on intervention. We have decades of evidence-based prevention strategies and intervention programs that focus on individuals at high risk, programs that have proved to reduce shootings and killings in high-violence communities, and have cut gun homicide rates in half. We must also consider our kids. Kids who are exposed to gun violence can suffer immediate and long-term effects, such as a change brain development, chronic health problems, mental illness, substance abuse, difficulty in forming healthy relationships, inability to secure stable employment, and an increased likelihood of criminal behavior.

Connecticut can no longer afford the societal and a financial cost of gun violence. The requested \$2.5 million dollar appropriation is less than 1 percent of the combined FY 2024 budget of the DPH and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, the agencies that are supposed to keep us safe. Our state has a projected FY 2023 budget surplus of over \$3 billion dollars, has proposed \$500 million dollars in tax breaks for next year, and has received \$6.3 billion dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act. Let's take that rescue plan money and our surplus and rescue our state from the scourge of gun violence. I am respectfully asking that instead of allocating \$2.5 million dollars, you allocate \$10 million dollars towards gun violence intervention programs yearly for the next 5 years, after which we can re-evaluate any further need.

Thank you for the privilege of the floor.